



Managing Cases of COVID-19 at New York City Colleges and Universities: What Higher Education Institutions Need to Know

Colleges and universities can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, faculty and staff. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) recommendations for colleges and universities are found in [Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education \(IHEs\)](#).

All people ages 12 and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. Vaccines are the best protection we have against COVID-19. Colleges and universities can play a critical role in encouraging vaccination and increasing vaccine uptake among students, faculty and staff. For information on COVID-19 vaccines, visit [nyc.gov/covidvaccine](#). To find a vaccination site, visit [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](#) or call 877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692). Many sites, including all City-run sites, no longer require an appointment.

For information, guidance, and resources on COVID-19, visit [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](#).

All administrators, staff, students and visitors should be reminded to continue to follow the key COVID-19 prevention measures:

- **Stay home if sick or were recently exposed to COVID-19:** Only leave for a COVID-19 test, essential medical care or other essential errands.
- **Keep physical distance:** If you are not vaccinated, stay at least 6 feet from others.
- **Keep your hands clean:** Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- **Wear a snug-fitting face mask:** When you wear a face mask, you protect people around you in case you are infected but do not know it. A face mask can also help protect you from infection. For more information, see [Face Masks: The Basics](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Is my college or university required to implement initial or routine COVID-19 testing for students or staff?

New York State (NYS) does not mandate initial (prior to entry) or routine testing of students or staff. For information about COVID-19 testing see [COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions](#). For help finding a New York City (NYC) testing site, visit [nyc.gov/covidtest](#). Many sites offer testing at no cost.

Does the Key to NYC apply to colleges and universities?

Yes, the [Key to NYC](#) requirement applies to gyms and fitness centers in higher education institutions, as well as dining establishments in colleges and universities. Resources on equitable implementation of Key to NYC are available online. Read “[Guidance for Businesses on Equitable Implementation of Key to NYC](#)” and “[Guidance for Customers and Employees on Equitable Implementation of Key to NYC](#).” For additional information about Key to NYC, visit

[“Frequently Asked Questions – Key to NYC: Requiring COVID-19 Vaccination for Indoor Entertainment, Recreation, Dining and Fitness Settings.”](#)

How will I learn there is a confirmed COVID-19 case at my college or university?

Colleges and universities with testing programs may be the first to know when a student, faculty or staff person is confirmed with COVID-19. Members of your community should be encouraged to report the results of COVID-19 testing to school authorities. The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) will contact colleges and universities when clusters of cases are detected.

What steps should I take when I learn that a student or staff member at my college or university has COVID-19?

If a person at your college or university has COVID-19 (positive diagnostic test), do the following:

- Confirm the person(s) had a diagnostic test for the virus (a molecular test such as a PCR or an antigen test) and **not** an antibody test (see [COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information).
 - Make sure they understand how to isolate safely at home and when they may return to work or school, (see [What to Do If You Have COVID-19](#) and [COVID-19: Understanding Quarantine and Isolation](#)). Assist students living on campus with isolation, as described [below](#). The person needs to isolate if they test positive for COVID-19, whether or not they have symptoms, even if fully vaccinated. We also recommend you provide information about how to access resources and receive paid leave, if eligible (see [Appendix: Resources](#)).
- Determine whether the person attended or worked in the school during their [infectious period](#) potentially exposing others to COVID-19.
- If they attended school during their infectious period, identify everyone who was a [close contact](#) of the person with COVID-19 during the person’s infectious period.
- Exclude all close contacts from school (unless they meet an exception to quarantine, as described [below](#)) and inform them that they must stay home and [separate from others](#) (including household members) for 10 days from the date of their last exposure. They should continue to monitor themselves for fever or other COVID-19 symptoms for four days after quarantine has ended. If symptoms occur, they should isolate themselves, contact their health care provider and get evaluated for COVID-19. For additional information on quarantine, including how to safely separate from others, see [COVID-19: Understanding Quarantine and Isolation](#).
- Submit information on the case and close contacts so they can be enrolled in the NYC Test & Trace Corps program by completing this [COVID-19 Facility Exposures Reporting form](#). You may contact the Facilities team at the Health Department by emailing facilities@health.nyc.gov, or call 866-692-3641, if you are having trouble with the form.
- Report the new COVID-19 case to the NYC Health Department by calling 866-692-3641. If the NYC Health Department determines that additional follow-up is needed, you will be contacted with instructions.

- See [Appendix: Identifying Close Contacts and Submitting Information to the NYC Test & Trace Corps for more information.](#)

What is a close contact?

A close contact is someone who has been within 6 feet for 10 minutes or more over a 24-hour period of someone who has COVID-19 during their infectious period, regardless of face mask use or the presence of plexiglass or other barriers. In most instances, all people living with someone who has COVID-19 are close contacts. If your university or college has instituted its own testing or contact tracing program, you must still assist the NYC Health Department and the NYC Test & Trace Corps in their contact tracing efforts.

Additionally, other people may be considered close contacts in certain situations, including:

- When physical distancing cannot be consistently monitored or maintained (such as on the school bus and during sports and recreational activities).
- When people are participating in activities that require releasing more air, such as vigorous exercise, singing or playing wind or brass instruments in an enclosed space.

What is the infectious period of a person with COVID-19?

The infectious period is when someone with COVID-19 may potentially spread it to others (when they are contagious).

- The **start date** of the infectious period is two days before the person had their first symptom or two days before their COVID-19 test date if they never have symptoms.
- The **end date** of the infectious period is 10 days after the person had their first symptom or 10 days after their COVID-19 test date if they never have symptoms.

The test date is the date when the test took place, not the date when the test results were reported to the provider or patient.

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

A person in isolation or quarantine should stay home and not go out except for getting essential medical care (including [COVID-19 testing](#)) or for essential needs, such as buying food, if there is no other way to do so. They otherwise should not leave home, including to attend classes or school activities.

A person must isolate if they test positive for COVID-19, whether or not they have symptoms, even if fully vaccinated. A person must quarantine if they have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19. They must [separate from others](#) for 10 days from the date of their last exposure. They should continue to monitor themselves for fever or other COVID-19 symptoms for four days after quarantine has ended. If symptoms occur, they should isolate themselves, follow the school protocol for contacting a health care provider and getting evaluated for COVID-19. Those who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or have had laboratory confirmed COVID-19 in the past 3 months and recovered do not need to quarantine.

See below for information on the length of isolation and quarantine. For additional information, see [COVID-19 Understanding Quarantine and Isolation](#).

Are there any exceptions to quarantine?

The following people do not need to quarantine, as long as they have no symptoms of COVID-19:

- Anyone who is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Fully vaccinated means it has been at least two weeks after they received their second dose of a two-dose vaccine (such as the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines) or two weeks after they received their single-dose vaccine (such as the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine). People who completed COVID-19 vaccination series with a vaccine that has been authorized by the World Health Organization (WHO) are also included.
- Anyone who has had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in the past three months and recovered. Three months is measured from the date a person first had COVID-19 symptoms or, if they had no symptoms, the date of their first positive diagnostic test.

How should my college or university provide isolation or quarantine for students and staff?

Students living in shared student housing who must isolate or quarantine should be provided a private room, have food delivered to them and trash picked up. If necessary, schools may house confirmed positive cases together (shared rooms and bathrooms) but symptomatic students who are not confirmed cases should be isolated separately. Students in quarantine may **not** be quarantined with other people but they may share a bathroom with proper cleaning and disinfection practices. Students may return home if they can safely isolate or quarantine there.

Colleges and universities providing isolation and quarantine facilities for their students or staff should provide support, such as food, medicine, medical and mental health services, and access to technology and other resources that enable ongoing participation in academic classes, assignments and remote activities as much as possible. This will help those isolating or quarantining to stay home and reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 at your school.

Can my college or university use the NYC Take Care Hotel Program to provide isolation and quarantine for students and staff?

Colleges and universities should provide quarantine arrangements for their students returning from out of state. For assistance with free hotel rooms for people needing to quarantine or isolate, visit nyhealthandhospitals.org/test-and-trace/take-care or call 212-COVID19 (212-268-4319).

When can a staff member or student return to school/campus if they have COVID-19?

Any person confirmed with COVID-19 must stay home (isolate) until all the following are true:

- At least 10 days have passed since the person's symptoms started
- They have not had a fever for the last 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication
- Their overall illness has improved

If the person never had symptoms, they should stay home for 10 days from the date they were tested.

When can a staff member or student return to school/campus if they had symptoms of COVID-19?

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, including a fever of 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit or greater, cough, loss of taste or smell, or shortness of breath that began within the past 10 days, cannot go to school or work **unless**:

- They test negative for COVID-19 by a molecular diagnostic test, **and** have not had a fever in the past 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication
 - The negative diagnostic test must be a molecular test (such as a PCR test). An antigen diagnostic test or antibody test is not acceptable for this purpose. People should ask their provider before they get tested to make sure they are getting the right type of test. When someone seeks to return to school or work after having had symptoms but before the end of their isolation period, you should verify their negative test result was from a molecular diagnostic test (PCR).
- **Or** it has been at least 10 days since their symptoms started **and** they have not had a fever for the last 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication **and** their overall illness has improved

For people with symptoms that begin less than three days after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine:

- If the **only** symptoms are fatigue, headache, chills, or muscle or joint pain, people may return to work if symptoms resolve within two days. If symptoms persist beyond this time frame, manage as potential COVID-19 infection (exclude them from school or work).
- If symptoms include cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, fever, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, manage as potential COVID-19 infection (exclude them from school or work).

If you have questions about a specific situation not addressed by the guidance in this section, call the NYC Health Department at 866-692-3641 to speak with an epidemiologist, available Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

A person in my school was identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19. Can they return to school or work before the end of their quarantine period if they test negative for COVID-19?

No. The person must stay home for 10 days. After the 10-day quarantine period ends and particularly for the first four days after it ends, people should continue to monitor for symptoms and strictly follow COVID-19 prevention practices, such as wearing a face mask, and practicing physical distancing and healthy hand hygiene because a person remains at risk for developing COVID-19 for up to 14 days after being exposed to the virus.

If a person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has not had a test yet (or test results are unknown), do close contacts of that person need to be identified and told to quarantine?

Quarantine of close contacts is triggered by lab confirmation (a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test result) that the person they were in close contact with has COVID-19. If there is a strong suspicion for COVID-19 based on either symptoms or a link to a confirmed case, then quarantine of close contacts pending lab results may be warranted. You may contact the NYC Health Department at 866-692-3641 for a consultation with an epidemiologist, as a case-by-case assessment is required. Consultation is available from Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Do the contacts of someone in quarantine also need to quarantine?

Contacts of someone in quarantine do not need to stay home unless the quarantined person tests positive for COVID-19. (Close contacts that develop symptoms should seek care and get tested for COVID-19.)

If someone has been vaccinated against COVID-19, do they still need to quarantine if they are identified as a contact?

No. People who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine following an exposure. However, if they develop symptoms of COVID-19, they must stay home (isolate) and should get tested.

Do individuals need to quarantine and be excluded from school or work following travel?

In New York State, quarantine is not required following domestic or international travel. However, it is recommended that people follow CDC travel guidelines, which includes a recommendation for people who are unvaccinated to quarantine following travel.

Can a student or staff member who has been tested for COVID-19 attend school or work while waiting for their test result?

If a staff member has had symptoms of COVID-19 within the last 10 days, they must stay home while they wait for their test results. They can return to school or work only when the criteria described above are met.

If a student or staff member has not had COVID-19 symptoms and was not recently exposed to someone with COVID-19, they may attend school or work while waiting for their test results.

Can I share information about the person with COVID-19 with my other staff?

No. You should not reveal the identity of the person with COVID-19 (other than to the NYC Health Department staff assisting in the investigation) or share information about the person that could identify them, including their class or where they worked or any information about the symptoms they may have had. That information is confidential health information. Maintaining confidentiality will help encourage other people to disclose when they have COVID-19.

Do I need to do any special cleaning or disinfection in areas used by people with COVID-19?

Close off areas used by people confirmed with COVID-19 who were in school during their infectious period. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines on [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

What if someone in my school has had an antibody test?

A positive or negative antibody test result should **not** be used to make any decisions about whether someone can work or attend school. Antibody tests for COVID-19 cannot be used to detect whether someone is currently sick or infected or whether someone is immune to the virus.

Appendix: Identifying Close Contacts and Submitting Information to the NYC Test & Trace Corps

Checklist:

- Confirm that the case was on site during their infectious period.
- Identify the people who had close contact with the case during their infectious period (see the example below).
- Notify the close contacts who have to quarantine.
- Submit information on close contact information to the NYC Health Department.

Example:

A student came to class on April 20. They first experienced symptoms on April 21. This means, the start of their infectious period is **April 19** (two days before their symptoms started) and the end of their infectious period is **May 1** (10 days after their symptoms started.)

April 19	April 20	April 21	April 22	April 23	April 24	April 25	April 26	April 27	April 28	April 29	April 30	May 1
Start of infectious period	Student came to class	Student first had symptoms										End of infectious period

The student reported that two students came to their room on April 20 for 15 minutes to discuss a project plan. They were all wearing face masks but were only three feet apart.

You should now complete the last two items in the checklist.

- Notify close contacts of their exposure **without** disclosing the identity of the person who has COVID-19 or other identified contacts.
 - Close contacts who fall into one of the quarantine exception categories (fully vaccinated or having had COVID-19 in the last three months, as described in the [FAQ section above](#)) do not need to quarantine and can come to school.
- Inform close contacts who do not fall into one of the exception categories that they need to quarantine for 10 days after the date they last had contact with the person who has COVID-19. See the [sample script](#) below for information you should give when communicating with close contacts.
- Submit a list of close contacts to the [NYC Test and Trace Corps](#) using the [COVID-19 Facility Exposures form](#).
 - The contact list for the student who has COVID-19 should include both students' first and last names, phone numbers, and date of last contact with the person. Dates of birth and addresses may be helpful but not necessary to include.
 - Please include all close contacts, including those that are fully vaccinated or had COVID-19 in the last 90 days and have recovered.
 - If you have trouble submitting the contact list using the COVID-19 Facility Exposure form, contact the Facilities team at the Health Department at facilities@health.nyc.gov, or call 866-692-3641.

Sample script:

Below is example language you can use to notify close contacts of their potential exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19:

“We are reaching out to notify you that you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 on [INSERT DATE]. According to the NYC Health Department, you should complete 10 days of quarantine starting from the date you may have been exposed. Quarantine includes staying home and separating from others in the household, except if you need to seek medical care.

You should also monitor yourself for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after the date you may have been exposed, including taking your temperature at least once a day and getting tested if you develop any symptoms. Common COVID-19 symptoms include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and loss of taste or smell. For a list of additional symptoms, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus and go to the Symptoms and Care webpage. You may want to get tested even if you do not have symptoms. To find a COVID-19 testing site, visit nyc.gov/covidtest. Many sites offer testing at no cost.

If you need a hotel so you can separate from others in your household and get support while quarantining, go to nychealthandhospitals.org/test-and-trace/take-care/. You can also call 212-COVID19 (212-268-4319) to receive help on how to access resources, including free hotel accommodations while quarantining or isolating, food resources, and paid sick leave for yourself or caring for a child who needs to isolate or quarantine.

Resources

We recommend you share the below resources with students, by email or otherwise:

- [What New Yorkers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Testing: Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [COVID-19: Understanding Quarantine and Isolation](#)
- [What to Do If You Have COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Resource Guide for New York City](#)

For additional information about COVID-19, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus. If you have questions, call **311**.”

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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